



Monday Monday

Connecting the Dots with Karen Kaplowitz



*Helping you create and reinforce the habits of successful career building,
gleaned from my work as a business development strategist, trainer and coach*

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Stop Pitching and Start Catching. Anticipating year end numbers of hours billed, business originated, and revenue collected, people are lining up as many opportunities to pitch as possible, inside and outside their firms, and casting about for people who can give them business. Sometimes it sounds like the Berenstain Bears' "bad case of the gimmies," with statements full of attitude like "I've sent you a lot of referrals and you have never sent one back." Consider taking a page from parenting skills 101, and get in the habit of active listening. Here are some strategies to consider:

- Don't make giving presentations on your firm's capabilities a top priority; do find reasons your clients have an impetus to invite you in.
- Don't go to meetings or lunch prepared to pitch, waiting for the opening to talk about your services. Do go ready to ask probing questions about the company's problems that might lead to work for your firm.
- Don't ask new colleagues which of their clients you can meet. Pick one of your clients and discuss where the fit might be for your new colleague.
- Don't plan meetings to ask clients for more work; do plan meetings to get feedback so you don't fall short of their expectations going forward.
- Don't rush in conversations to offer your opinions and solutions; listen carefully and encourage clients to elaborate on their struggles first.

Example: Your client's law department has changed significantly in the last year; senior lawyers you knew have retired; there were layoffs and consolidation; and most disturbingly, lawyers from a competitor law firm have infiltrated the law department. A few times, you have offered the general counsel to bring in a team to make a presentation to insure the new people know your firm. She always says "great" but never sets it up.

You try a different tack. First, you ask for a new org chart of the law department, and bios if available. Then you ask when your people could meet the new in-house lawyers to *hear* from them what they are up against. The general counsel warms to the idea of your investing in learning about her new team's challenges and invites you to an all hands meeting. You propose a meeting agenda for the client's department heads to make short presentations on their priorities, with questions from your lawyers. You help your team prepare to probe the new priorities. At the end, the general counsel invites you to introduce your people and to stay for coffee. You have planned your lawyers' introductions of themselves to be very brief but targeted to the client's most pressing needs. There is lively discussion when everyone mingles over coffee.

Are you willing to consider substituting "reverse presentations" from your clients instead of pressing to give presentations about your firm to clients? Is the urgency to make your year end numbers causing you to push too hard when active listening, probing, and connecting the dots are the better course of action?

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